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Reviews.

VERNET'S "BRETHREN OF JOSEPH."

THE New York public is indebted to the enterprise of Messrs. Goupil & Co., for the pleasure of seeing another noble picture—"The Brethren of Joseph," by Horace Vernet. The advent of such a picture deserves more notice than the passing announcement of its being on exhibition. It is a work by a man who has made a point in the history of Art—who has done as much as any artist to individualize his age by a new development of the artistic power.

What Raphael did for the Religious Art—what Michael Angelo for the Intellectual—Titian for the Sensuous—Turner for its Landscape Ideal—that Horace Vernet has done for the Real—viz., brought it to that consummation where we no longer feel that anything is wanting to fulfil all it proposes—where the Feeling for the subjective and the Power of expression keep so entirely together, that we know that the artist has done all that can be done in that way. We give to such men a solitary throne—we may not kneel before it, or offer our allegiance to it, but we concede it to them as, for the present, at least, the conquerors of a new realm of Intellect.

That which Vernet has accomplished is his own—in it he has no rivals; and, though it is a folly to say that the human mind cannot, at any moment, surpass its highest effort of the past moment, we can safely say that until the Philosophy of the external world has made another advance, we need look for no fuller representation of it than he has given us.

Receiving our impressions of him from his works alone, he seems to us a clear, unimpassioned, impassive mind, receiving every influence from the outer world, and transmitting it in its exact form and color, without the slightest infusion of his own individuality, and with a power which accomplishes *with ease* whatever it undertakes, and leaves you scarcely conscious that the Artist was anything more than a transparent medium through which the light of nature shone unrefracted and untinted. Poetry, Sentiment, Philosophy, are alike overborne by this full flood of the perception of the Actual. There is nothing of the glow of poetic thought—nothing of the individual strength, weakness, or aspiration—but, having forgotten himself, he has made us also forget him. He has no view of the thing which he desires you to consider, because it is his—he apparently regards himself as an agency, rather than a component part, of the artistic result achieved. He does not win your love, because you do not feel that he loved that which he paints, but rather that he saw it with a clearness, marvellous in itself, and represented it by a mighty mechanical impulse.

Except his faculty of seeing so much and so accurately, there is nothing so wonderful as the unconsciousness of the power manifest in his pictures. There is no doubt, no hesitation, no weakness. It is said that if he wishes to draw a figure, he places a model in the desired attitude for a moment, and then paints his figure without further reference to it, and that he has only to look at a

costume to be able to reproduce it. Whether this be true of all his pictures or not, it still illustrates the genius of the man; it is true to the idea if not to the fact. It would seem to be true of his great battle-pieces at Versailles, where the rush of action and the motion represented apparently forbid further study than a momentary glance; but the "Brethren of Joseph" is evidently painted more at leisure, and studied with more care for artistic completeness. Without the power and wonder-producing qualities of the "Smala," therefore, this picture is more satisfying as a whole. The composition is more harmonious than the chance-thrown panoramic groups of the Smala. It seems to be rather the results of a play of thought and study than one of his power-driven works, and seems scarcely to need an elaborate criticism to point out its excellences; yet there are some points well worth thinking of.

Those who saw Landseer's "Twins" will find an instructive contrast between its animal painting and that of the "Brethren of Joseph." The former is dexterously imitated hide—mere surface; while the latter, with less attempt at superficial truth, still gives under the skin the anatomy of the creature, and though the only thing of moment of this kind is the dead goat, there is more profound knowledge of animal nature than in all Landseer's picture. The goat is *very dead*, and the painting of the hair as well as other texture-painting in the picture, is thorough enough to satisfy any but a Pre-Raphaelite taste. The sheep-skin jacket of one of the brothers is as well realized as anything of the kind we have ever seen, yet without being obtrusive.

Compare, also, the accessory landscape of the two pictures. In that of Vernet every object has a natural connection with the picture, and is given with botanical accuracy; nor is anything painted otherwise, than as though the artist thought it worthy his attention.

There is one thing which indicates—still more perfectly than anything we have spoken of—the realism of Vernet's talent. The figures are all modern Arabs and in the costume of the day, and this, which seems, at first thought, a fault, is really one of the prime excellences of the picture. Vernet felt the force of the present too strongly to attempt, in any degree, to go back to a past, of whose habits and circumstances he knew nothing, and of which he must paint at random. Joseph has really nothing to do with the picture; but, if he had lived, and been thus treated at this day, he would have been so represented. This is the true artistic idea of life. Humanity is always the same; and the Joseph of Pharaoh's day is the Joseph of to-day, in a different dress—the form is different—the substance the same. The brethren may be bad Hebrews, but they are perfect Arabs; and thus the picture, though inconsistent with the legend, is, in all respects, consistent with itself.

Technically, there is a falsehood in the perspective of the picture—the figures being on one plane and the landscape on another—but it is evidently intentional, and for an adequate purpose, so that we shall not at present speak of it; more particularly as we have the intention to treat of artistic licenses at length shortly.

Correspondence.

OUR NATIONAL PAINTINGS.

WASHINGTON CITY, Feb. 16th, 1855.

Now that the eight panels of the Rotunda in the Capitol have been filled with the *National Paintings* ordered by Congress, I have thought that you might be pleased to receive a letter about them. Excepting a few portraits to be found in the Senate Chamber, the House of Representatives, the Congressional Library, the Executive Mansion and the Departments, and a few pieces of statuary, the paintings in question constitute the entire Art possessions of the United States. Of the eight panels, four have been filled by Trumbull, one by Chapman, one by Weir, one by Vanderlyn, and one by Powell. The aggregate cost of these pictures was seventy-two thousand dollars—eight thousand dollars apiece for the first four, and ten thousand each for the remainder.

The paintings by Trumbull illustrate what the artist considered the four more prominent events of the Revolution:—1st, the "Declaration of Independence;" 2d, "Surrender of the British to the American forces at Saratoga;" 3d, "Surrender of the British to the American forces at Yorktown;" and 4th, the "Resignation of General Washington." To describe and criticize these pictures with minuteness is not my intention, and would be a waste of time; for, by the art of the engraver, they have been made as familiar to the American people as a thrice-told tale. Each of these paintings has a surface of eighteen feet by twelve, and the figures are large as life. As works of Art merely, I am not disposed to award to them anything like extraordinary praise, but as containing a large collection of authentic portraits, they must be considered as positively invaluable. They do not in my estimation, display as much artistic genius as certain other productions of the artist, executed on a small scale, but they are animated by a matter of fact spirit, which is sure to attract attention. The costumes of the time are faithfully represented, and the poetical liberties taken by the artist are few and far between; he seems to have faithfully adhered to his original determination of rendering the several pictures accurate memorials of the important events represented. In point of action, they are below mediocrity, and the defects of drawing are quite too numerous; but with regard to color and design, they are worthy of considerable praise. In looking at Col. Trumbull's productions, and remembering his history, it must appear evident that, had he devoted his entire life to his chosen art, he might have become exceedingly eminent; but it was the will of fortune that he should become quite famous for his knowledge in military and diplomatic affairs, as he was for poetical and theoretical learning in his art. As a pioneer artist, in the historical line, he is deserving of a high rank; but as a master and a guide, he is decidedly behind several of his successors. The very idea of placing in the Capitol of the United States a series of national paintings, was, in itself, creditable, though imported from Europe; but the subjects chosen to be represented, proved the soldier-artist to have been possessed of

an accomplished and well-balanced mind. And now, that we are about to part with Col. Trumbull, after so brief an interview, we would take the liberty of recommending to the consideration of your readers, for their edification, a certain volume published in 1841, by Wiley & Putnam, entitled "Autobiography, Reminiscences and Letters of John Trumbull."

We now come to speak of Weir's "Embarkation of the Pilgrims," which is confessedly, and beyond dispute, one of the finest pictures in the Capitol, and, indeed, none other can compare with it, excepting Vanderlyn's "Landing of Columbus," and, in several respects, this has the advantage even of that. The picture represents the company of the Pilgrims "uniting in prayer" on the deck of the ship *Speedwell*, just previous to her departure from Holland. The pastor, Robinson, is "addressing the Throne of Grace," and the rest, some are kneeling and some standing, with feelings evidently deeply agitated by the solemn leave-taking. The general grouping of the figures is very good, combining regularity with freedom. The kneeling figures nearly form an unfinished circle, somewhat like the plan of Raphael's cartoon of the Death of Ananias. But the regularity and formality of this is finely broken, by the introduction of the three standing groups behind—the most numerous of which clusters around the mast of the vessel, and the other two are disposed with grace and ease on either side. No great and striking anomaly can be pointed out in this beautifully balanced design, like that of the band of pigmies in the background of the "Landing of Columbus;" but all displays the deep study of a master of design, as well as the ease of a practised hand.

It has been objected to this picture that it is nearly all in shadow—that the cold grey tints are too abundant—and that there is so little light and cheerfulness about it as to make it, at first sight, repulsive and chilling—and that its beauties require to be studied out before they can be discovered. But, so far from being blemishes, these are, in fact, in some of the finest and truest beauties of the painting, as a work of Art. The Puritans themselves, of whom the Pilgrims were the quintessence, were a repulsive sort of men. Cold, stern, and steeled against most of the gentler sympathies and feelings of humanity, they gave themselves up to fanaticism, which, to a kind heart, was as repulsive as it was exclusive. It would have been out of character, therefore, to have represented them in any attractive light. And the artist has been true to nature in another respect. The main lights of the picture are in the distant sky and on two of the female figures. So in the history of the Puritans, the only cheering spot is in their religion; while all its warmth came from the character, the devotion and affection of those who clung to their husbands so faithfully, as to follow them to the "howling wilderness," and lighten its dreariness by the smiles and embraces of pure affection. Thus, the strongest, and warmest, and richest light in the picture, falls on the figure of Mrs. White, who was the first Puritan mother in Plymouth Colony. But there is, however, another reason for the darkness and gloom of the picture, which probably weighed not a little in the mind of the gifted artist.

The greater part of the company are in deep shadow; and most appropriately, for their position at the time was one overshadowed with gloom from many causes; there was the shadow of banishment from home, also the shadow of an irksome residence in a strange land, to which might be added the shadows of parting with friends and of the dangers of the sea. No wonder, no wonder, then, that sadness and sorrow ruled the hour.

In his costumes the artist has proved himself familiar with the history of the time delineated; the ship receives its share of attention; and the armor is likewise represented with all the hardness, coldness, and strength which were characteristics of the corslets of the Covenanters. But, alas! for the truth of nature, by far too great a number of the company are praying with their eyes open. A number, indeed, have their eyes devoutly shut; but the Pastor himself, the Ruling Elder and his wife, Mr. Fuller, Miles Standish and wife, with many others, have their eyes wide open, which is contrary to the Puritan precept, precedent and practice. Even the Yankees of the present day, wide awake as they are in everything else, persist in praying with their eyes shut. And another blemish is, that it is almost impossible to distinguish the praying Pastor from the listening Elder. The Bible in the hands of the Elder seems out of place, and ought to have been before the Pastor; and, as *he* ought to have been made the soul of the picture, this indistinguishability is a serious blemish. But, after all, the picture is full of fine points, and I cannot imagine who, among American painters, could have produced a more perfect painting.

And now for Vanderlyn's picture of the "Landing of Columbus." It is, beyond doubt, a noble work—one which does honor to the artist and the nation. The central group is exceedingly fine—artistically speaking, nearly faultless. The chiaroscuro is bold and clear; the figures, especially the musketeer, seeming to stand out completely from the canvas, while the horizon beyond, veiled in the dreamy haze of a tropical noon, leads the eye to a great distance, where the caravels are safely moored. The costumes are given with admirable fidelity, but it is a wonder how they should have been kept so clean after a voyage in Spanish vessels. All must admire the judgment of the painter in giving a subdued and thoughtful expression to most of the principal characters, instead of a lively joy, and delighted surprise, which some might be disposed to expect. Generally speaking, the figures have a thoughtful and subdued expression; while the countenance of Columbus speaks the high, solemn and religious enthusiasm which had prompted the enterprise. The introduction of the little boy, in a kneeling attitude, in the foreground, was a beautiful thought, and in point of execution is one of the finest features of the picture.

In its perspective, however, this painting is deficient; that of the principal group not agreeing at all with the rest of the pictures. The contrast in size of the two classes of figures is altogether too great, and reminds one of Gulliver and the Lilliputians. The Spaniard, clutching at the shining sand, is a good idea; but the foliage on the opposite side is bad, betraying only a green-house

acquaintance with the vegetable productions of the tropics. But, with all these imperfections in minor matters, the heart and soul of the picture, consisting of the discoverer and his surrounding companions, must stamp it as among the very best this country has yet produced.

With regard to the "Baptism of Pocahontas," by Chapman, I have only to say, that, in my opinion it is unworthy of the artist, of the position it occupies, and the Government to which it belongs.

As to the "Discovery of the Mississippi by De Soto," painted by Powell, it only exhibits the immense gulf that exists between the Fine Arts and the arts of Congressional demagogues. In awarding this last commission, Congress did great injustice, to the memory of the lamented Inman (who received the original order, but died before he could complete it) and also to the more able and experienced among American artists, and especially to Daniel Huntington, who nobly offered to do it for a mere song, and who was a favorite pupil of Inman, and is one of our masters in the historical line. For the sake of our national reputation, now that the capital is swelling out into gigantic proportions, it is earnestly to be hoped that such men as Huntington and Leutze, and Rothermel may yet be permitted to make their mark upon the marble walls of the metropolis.

CHARLES LANMAN.

GEORGETOWN, D. C., Feb. 13, 1855.

MR. EDITOR:—As you lately published a letter about the Fine Arts in Washington, it has occurred to me that you might be pleased to receive something on the same subject from the sister city of Georgetown. There are several fine paintings here, scattered about (one of them an altar-piece presented to the Convent by Charles X. of France), and three gentlemen have collections worthy of notice, viz:—

Mr. Crampton, the British minister, himself an artist of celebrity, has four water-colors by David Cox of England, two of them very large and fine; three by Copely Fielding, two of them superb; three by Prout; one by Varley; one by Bennet, fine; also numerous water-colors by himself, and one of the finest collections of "etchings" in existence.

Mr. Charles Lanman (to whom we shall allude hereafter), has a fine cabinet collection, containing good specimens of Leutze, Huntington, Sully, Stuart, Fisher of Boston, Hubbard, White, Tice, Church, Durand, Cole, Crampton, Harvey, David Cox of England, and Lecompte of France. Mr. L.'s collection of original sketches is most unique and valuable, embracing the productions of A. Scheffer, T. S. and A. Cooper, Sir E. Landseer, Copely Fielding, Sir Charles Eastlake, Weir, the Mounts, Huntington, Rothermel, Ranney and many others.

Col. William Doughty has a fine collection of the works of his brother, Thomas Doughty, the celebrated landscape painter. It contains about fifteen of his very best pictures, one of them exquisite for silvery tone, and two splendid autumnal effects. Admirers of Doughty's works should visit this collection, where the varied touches of his master-hand contrast strongly with each other, yet harmonize and blend.

There are also three artists in George-

town, if we do not count the amateur efforts of Mr. Crampton, who sketches with great ability. Lanman has taken a studio, and joined the goodly fellowship of professional artists. His former amateur productions, enable him to enter the profession with a deserving reputation—and on his long tours, over almost every section of this Republic, he has made large numbers of sketches and studies, affording a mass of valuable material. Just now, he is putting the finishing touches to seven or eight pictures, four of which (if I am not in error) are destined for your New York Academy Exhibition.

Bessan, a talented young Frenchman, was a pupil of Isabey and Ciceri, and is thoroughly versed in his Art—excelling in water-colors, but painting in oils with freedom. After leaving Paris, he spent a few years in the wilds of Canada, and his sketches of the picturesque scenery of that region are remarkably fine. Mrs. Pierce has recently given him an order; and his friends are urging him to send representatives of his genius to the next exhibition of your Academy of Design.

Mr. George West, a native of North Carolina, is a nephew of that esteemed veteran editor, Joseph Gales, Esq. Educated in Philadelphia, Mr. West accompanied the mission of Gen. Cushing to China, where he resided seven years. Possessing rare powers as a draughtsman, he has brought home representations of everything of interest in the "land of flowers," from which he is now painting a series of large pictures. These will illustrate every prominent phase of life among the "Celestials," and will be highly creditable as works of Art.

Your Washington correspondent omitted to mention a number of the richest Art-treasures of the metropolis. In Mr. Corcoran's gallery are two pictures by Raphael Mengs and the elder Vernet, which are first-rate—also some water-colors by Cattermole.

Professor Bache has several portraits by Sir Peter Lely; Mr. Geo. W. Riggs, among others, an original Gainsborough, and one or two Morelands. Mr. R. S. Chilton (the poet), some good things, several of them by Düsseldorf artists. Mr. James McGuire, two or three good old pictures, with the more modern productions of Edmonds, Elliott, Leutze and Chapman.

Looking in at a frame-makers this morning, we saw a fine view of Petersburg, Virginia, by McLeod, well known in your city, and now located in Alexandria. Johnson, a young Washington artist now in Florence, has just sent home from Florence a picture ordered by W. W. Corcoran, Esq.

And now let us say a word, in conclusion, to any lovers of Art who may visit Washington. Just before Mr. Marsh left for Constantinople, he disposed of his valuable collection of line engravings and etchings to the Smithsonian Institute. If any one fond of Art comes this way, let him hunt them up, and enjoy their beauties.

PERLEY.

FRANKFORT, KY., Feb. 5, 1855.

MY FRIENDS:—For two days past I have been in the Capitol of Kentucky, a city nestled among hills, whose bases are washed by the Kentucky River. Some short rambles that I made, disclosed to me the

fact that it had a jail, court-house, arsenal, several churches, and the State House—the last a structure of light-hued limestone, with a Grecian front, a cupola on top, modern windows, and parallel outside stairway, with an iron hand-railing. This is a grouping readily to be admitted not very congruous, but it serves to attract the eye. The building stands in a moderate sized park, with numerous trees, and surrounded by a massive iron railing. The Capitol Hotel, close at hand, is built of rough-faced limestone, from a design by Rogers, of Boston, and is much more imposing than the State House, from its size and massiveness, resembling somewhat "the Astor" and "Tremont" of the East, by the same architect.

The Cemetery has been laid out with much taste, and is worthy of the praise the townsmen lavish on it. It is most happily located; shut out from contact with the living workday world, the river, sky, and distant mountains appear to bound it, and the last resting-place of man is indeed in "the haunts of nature." It was covered six inches deep with snow—all the trees save the evergreen, arborvitæ and pine, were bare of foliage, but in a genial season it must be rich in beauty of verdure. Prominent above all is the monument erected by order of the State of Kentucky, to the memory of the officers and soldiers who have fallen in defence of our country, from earliest days down to the Mexican War. It is of statuary marble, apparently eighty or ninety feet high—a square shaft resting on a granite base. The shaft is subdivided by eight bands, on which are inscribed the names of officers who fell in the battles of the Thames, Tippecanoe, Fort Meigs, Raisin, Monterey, Buena Vista, &c. The conspicuous ornaments are four eagles holding wreaths from corners at the bottom of the shaft—two medallions with the State emblem of the two pioneers; and the motto, "United we stand, divided we fall." The cornice at the top is finished with a semblance of war-plumes, and the whole is surmounted by a figure of Victory distributing wreaths—at her feet are cannon, shot, and such like warlike stores.

Placed where it is, the effect is most pleasing and highly creditable to our townsman, Robert E. Launitz, who designed and executed it. A few feet from it is another of a smaller size, also by Launitz—and erected by the State in testimony of the important services rendered by Col. Richard Mentor Johnson. The design is a broken column placed on a shaft, and the fracture draped with a blanket, on which stands an eagle with a civic wreath; on the base are sculptured a large medallion bust, and a bas relief of his conflict with Tecumseh. The Trabue family have an expensively built tomb with sculptured figures. A simple slab of stone marks the grave of Daniel Boone, and round it grows cane and other wild shrubbery that links this with a pioneer era.

The only evidences I had of Art in town, were a couple of pencil lithographs in a drygoods store window, heaps of vulgar valentines, and three copies in the hotel office of an engraving from Bingham's picture of the County Election.

One landscape artist, several portrait painters, some lithographers and wood engravers are to be found. There are two

frame stores, in the window of one of which, I saw D. M. Carter's picture from "The Deserted Village;" but altogether Art may be put down as rather stagnant; some ambitious buildings of stone progress, one for Masonic Hall, another for Custom House, and many stores not calling for comment.

W. C.

THE sale of the collection of Baron Mecklenburg recently took place at Paris. The curiosity of amateurs was greatly excited, for, although the collection was very celebrated, few persons had ever the good fortune to see it. The pictures fetched fabulous prices; among others, the reputed *chef d'œuvre* of Wouvermans, *A Horse Market*, in composition, color, and touch most exquisite, besides being in a state of excellent preservation, was bought by the Marquis of Hertford, for 80,000 francs (\$16,000). It was bought at the sale of the Duchess de Berri, in 1837, for 35,600 francs, having more than doubled its value in seventeen years. The highest price hitherto obtained for a work of Wouvermans never exceeded 60,000 francs, which sum was paid for one of his pictures at the sale of Cardinal Fesch. The next picture, in rank of price, was *A Landscape*, by Hobbema, which sold for 72,000 francs (nearly \$14,500), an enormous price, which is only explained by the extreme rarity of the works of this master. The work in question, otherwise very beautiful, is nevertheless not one of the artist's choicest works; its color and touch are rather hard and dry, which is not atoned for by its vigor, feeling, and brilliancy. Hobbema, in what concerns quality of finish, is generally superior to Ruysdael, although less sincere than him. A very fine picture by John Both sold for 28,200 francs (about \$5,640). A splendid portrait of the *Burgomaster Sixt*, by Rembrandt, sold for 28,000 francs. *A Flower Piece*, by Van Huysum, for 13,000 francs. *A View of Haarlem*, by J. Ruysdael, for 7,900 francs. A picture by Weenix, *Dead Game*, a very choice specimen, 9,000 francs. A tolerably good picture by Paul Potter, 6,450 francs. A composition, by Berghem, very black in the shadows, sold for 19,000 francs. A Van der Neer, 4,100 francs. *A Landscape with waterfall*, by Ruysdael, 14,000 francs. *A Marine Piece*, by Wm. Van der Velde, 8,900 francs. *A St. Hubert*, by Wouvermans, 7,200 francs. The thirty pictures forming the entire collection, realized the enormous sum of 356,000 francs, or \$70,000.—*The Artist*.

PAOLO TOSCHI.—Soon after the death of this famous engraver, which took place last year, his family sent an agent to London with the object of proposing to some of our leading publishers the continuation of his great work—the reproduction of the frescoes of Correggio and Parmigiano—of which he had left in progress, plates and materials of importance; but we are sorry to add that the agent found no encouragement from our large print publishers. The lovers of Correggio and Parmigiano will be glad to hear that the undertaking of Toschi will now be continued by his successor, the eminent engraver Cavaliere Raimondi. This information we have obtained from a letter of his which appeared in the *Gazetta di Parma*, addressed to the former subscribers to the work of Toschi. These engravings, when completed, will form an epoch in the world of Art, as they are, without doubt, amongst the finest ever produced.—*Ibid*.

At a sale of autographs which took place lately at Paris, a letter of the painter Léopold Robert, sold for 111 francs, but an autograph of Paul Véronèse only fetched 72½ francs. To this may be added, that a note of Minette's, formerly actress at the Vaudeville, sold for 37 francs, and a letter of Chateaubriand's only commanded 10 francs.—*Ibid*.